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U.S. judge OKs move to settle 'spy' suit here

By Jay Branegan

FEDERAL JUDGE Susan Getzendanner gave her preliminary approval Tuesday to settlement of a class action suit against the FBI and the CIA that would end six years of litigation over charges that the two agencies illegally spied on activist groups and individuals and disrupted their activities.

Getzendanner, of U.S. District Court, gave the go-ahead for the next step toward final approval of the settlement after a handful of the original individuals and organizations that helped bring the spying charges formally criticized the proposed settlement as being too lax, but announced they would not stand in the way of final approval.

Getzendanner set a hearing for Feb. 13 to consider objections from individual members of the class. After that hearing, she could make the settlement final.

THE CASE involves two suits brought by the Alliance to End Repression and the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of more than 50 Chicago-area community groups, churches, civil rights groups, political organizations, and individuals.

They charged that through the mid-1970s, the CIA and the FBI, along with the Chicago Police Department's Red Squad, conducted surveillance, compiled dossiers, conducted clandestine break-ins, and sabotaged some groups' activities, all of which violated their constitutional rights.

Under the proposed settlement, the FBI admits to the break-ins, known as "black bag jobs," and agrees to ban the practice. The agency says it will limit its investigations generally to criminal activity, and the CIA agrees to adhere to laws barring it from domestic operations.

The City of Chicago has not agreed to a settlement, and both cases against the police department are pending.

HOWEVER, THE Socialist Workers Party, the Young Socialists Alliance, and activist lawyers G. Flint Taylor, Jeffrey Haas, and Dennis Cunningham objected to the proposed consent decree, engineered primarily by Richard Gutman of the Alliance and Douglas Cassel for the ACLU.

"We feel the proposed decree is fraught with ambiguities, all running to the benefit of the government," the three lawyers stated in legal papers. They said the monitoring provisions of the decree are too lax.